

X

Christian Indignation.

J. H. McBaine.



Christian Indignation.

Rev. J. H. McIlbaine, D. D.,

The Presbyterian Church,

Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

A Union Service.

June Thirtieth,

1918.

Christian Indignation.

*Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee?
and am I not grieved with those that rise up
against Thee?*

*I hate them with perfect hatred, I count them
mine enemies. Ps. 139: 21, 22.*



THIS is so near the Fourth of July that if I say some things this morning which seem more appropriate to that day than Sunday, to the platform than to the pulpit, more patriotic than religious, I hope it will be attributed to the proximity of our National Day.

A few weeks ago in one of our church papers there was an appeal to the clergy to stop preaching about the war, as the people heard, read, thought of nothing else during the week, and on Sunday wanted something different. But the war is the thing that we are thinking about and ought to think about on Sundays as well as week days, that we ought to speak of in our

churches as well as elsewhere, for the war and the winning of the war is the chief business that we have on hand, our chief business as Christians and as Churches as well as Citizens. We ought to be thinking, talking, praying and working for it with all our might. It is more important than all our Missions for the war does more hurt to the world in a week than our Missions can do good in a year. It is more important than all our charities for it causes far more suffering, poverty, wretchedness than our charities can begin to relieve. It is even more important than our personal salvation, not indeed to us individually, but to the Kingdom of God and the cause of righteousness. The greatest enemy of the Kingdom, the greatest opponent of righteousness is this great German power, which posing under the name of Christian, defies and tramples on every principle that Christ taught.

St. Paul puts his patriotism above his salvation. "I could wish myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen after the flesh." That surely is the supreme limit of patriotism. Many have died for their country, but the only man I ever heard of who was willing to be damned for his countrymen was St. Paul. The winning of the war is our chief business as a nation. Everything must bend to it, work for it, make sacrifices for it. This great war machine, this juggernaut of nations, that is trying to crash its way through the world, grinding the weaker peoples under

its wheels, leaving ruin and desolation in its track, must be smashed utterly and beyond the possibility of repair. Our President says: "The German power, a thing without honor or conscience or capacity for covenanted peace, must be crushed."

The churches must not only make sacrifices but must lead in the work. Nothing is more absurd than to say in one breath, "win the war." and in the next—"business as usual." Nothing can be as usual. Business must be carried on not for the accumulation of wealth, but for the winning of the war. Households must be conducted not for comfort and convenience merely, but with such economies as will help the winning of the war. The Church and Church people should surely lead in everything that embodies the idea of sacrifice, sending our sons, giving and working through the Red Cross, the Young Men's Christian Association and other kindred organizations for the welfare of our soldiers, for the relief of human suffering and need, with war savings and economies of every kind, remembering that true saving embodies sacrifice, self-denial, going without things that are wanted that the money may be used in the countless needs for the winning of the war.

There is no difference of opinion among us as to the evil of war. We are a peaceful people, we hate war and love peace, love it so much that we are going to have it if we have to fight and die for it. We abhor

the very idea of bloodshed, the tales that come to us of the sufferings of our soldiers and sailors make our very blood curdle and fill us with dismay. If there were any other way out of it, if savage men, more like savage beasts than men, could be brought to terms by reason or moral suasion or any other means we should not be fighting. It is not because we love militarism but because we hate it, and because we have reluctantly come to see that a brutal power organized, and for a generation preparing to dominate the liberties of the world can be met and overcome only by force of arms. When a mad dog is running through the streets snapping, biting, carrying awful death, there is nothing to do but to kill it. When an infuriated elephant breaks loose from the menagerie and goes trumpeting, raging through the city, the great beast must be killed. The whole German nation seems to have gone insane with the craze for power, the ambition of empire, and the deadly hatred of all who stand in their way. It seems to have sold its soul to the devil of materialism, for the promised kingdoms of the world and their glories. We believe that a savage enemy, who flouts all mercy and all moral obligations can be mastered by force only. Moral suasion is worse than wasted on a rampant wild beast, and repellent as the thought is to us there is nothing for it but to meet and down this demon power with the weapons of war.

✧ Perhaps no nation is wholly free from blame in

regard to the war. All have sins to confess and repent of; but it is a matter of record and history will show that the allied nations exhausted every resource of diplomacy in their desire to avoid war, and almost went on their knees to the Kaiser with entreaties that he would spare the world the catastrophe into which he and his Potsdam gang were determined to plunge it. We ourselves kept out until our enemies derided us as cowards, our friends thought us morally indifferent, and we were beginning to lose our sense of self-respect as a nation. One nation more than any other is responsible for the war, and on that nation must rest the hot indignation of all men who love peace and righteousness. The trampling on Belgium and the treatment of its people is one of the most infamous and dastardly crimes committed by any nation in the past thousand years. If that were not wrong then there has never been a wrong thing done on this planet since the beginning of time.

We have taken up the sword to make sure that never again on this planet shall a brutal military power attempt to establish the rule of might over right, to set up a new moral, or rather immoral code, and to dominate the life and liberties of other peoples. While we are about it we are going to write it with both pen and sword so indelibly that no back flowing wave of barbarism shall ever wash it out. "The object of this war," says President Wilson, "is to deliver the

free peoples of the world from the menace and actual power of a vast military establishment, controlled by an irresponsible government, which having secretly planned to dominate the world, proceeded to carry this plan out without regard to the sacred obligations of treaty, or the long established practices and the long cherished principles of international action and honor."

The thing most to be dreaded is not the continuance of the war even for years, but a premature and inconclusive peace, a peace that settles nothing. That would be more disastrous than war. It would secure to Germany the chief aims for which the war was caused; it would leave the world wholly without security for the future; it would nullify all our sacrifices; it would mean the surrender of the ideals and principles for which we are fighting, and the triumphant establishment of the aims and ambitions, the methods and principles that Germany has made her own. Our allies may well be exhausted after the four years of terrific strain and loss. "England," says Sir Douglas Haig, "is fighting with her back to the wall." France has thrown in her last reserve; they are holding on like grim death waiting for us to get there. Thank God we are at last getting there with gathering force, and increasing momentum; and, if need be it is for us, alone and single handed, to carry it on to a decisive issue. We can do it, we must do it, we must never let a thought to the contrary cross our minds. We

have the men and the money, we shall soon have the ships, munitions, supplies, and we must go on to the end. It may be that God has raised us up for this same purpose, has given to us our great possessions and powers. The greatest evil that can befall the world is not war but unrighteous peace, and the greatest enemy of the country and humanity at the present time is the pacifist, right minded, high minded as he may be in other matters, but in this woefully wrong minded. We are in the war to stay and to stay until the issues are settled, and settled right, in it to the last man and the last dollar if it takes a life time, and we must have no other thought.

While we are making vast preparations for war, while we read with satisfaction of the great losses of the Germans and wish they might be greater, while we are praying for victory knowing what that must mean, it is of no use to pretend that we love the Germans. We do not love them, at least I do not, and I am not going to pretend that I do. It would be rank hypocrisy. But when we ask ourselves the question whether a Christian can and should hate any one, we find ourselves knee deep in difficulties. When we read and hear and find established beyond question the atrocities, the brutalities, the hideous, unmentionable, almost inconceivable cruelties inflicted by Germany in Belgium and France, in Poland and Servia, the Christian finds himself possessed by a strange feeling. Something

happens to the muscles of his jaw, his finger tips tingle, his fists clench, and a strong desire to punish some one vigorously grips him. And the worst or the best of it is, that he is not in the least ashamed of what he feels. He is so fully persuaded that what he feels is right, is the way a Christian ought to feel in the presence of such cruelty and wickedness that he is almost ready to turn on any one who remains calm and unmoved by the facts. Hate may not be the word that he likes to use, but whatever name he gives to it he feels no shame, and his conscience approves of it. He finds himself in sympathy with the Old Testament. "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee?" rings through his soul with moral assurance. Some of the psalms that used to make him shudder now do not cause a shiver. The exterminating wars of the Jews that used to strain his faith as commanded by God, he now thinks may have had their justification.

We must be frank and honest with ourselves in dealing with this question. The most of us in our Sunday moods have talked of how a Christian ought to feel toward his enemies in a way that has now rather a hollow ring. Many a preacher of the gospel feels that he is obliged to teach that a Christian must unconditionally love everybody. As a matter of fact he knows that he does not and does not intend to, but he is not quite sure whether it is due to the out-croppings of the old Adam, or whether it is a perfectly respectful

virtue. He may not use the word hate with all its controversial implications, but when he reads and thinks of what the Kaiser has done and is doing, his glorification of the sinking of the *Lusitania* and his reward of the man who did the deed, his agreement with Turkey for the extermination of the Armenian race, his attempt to incite the Mohammedans to a holy war against the Christians, and a thousand other things, he has to confess that his fists feel a yearning toward the Kaiser's person, and he would like to put an end to the whole Potsdam coterie in a way that would be very unpleasant for them.

Would it not clear the air of a lot of hypocrisy or at least insincerity to make such a frank confession of what we feel and cannot help feeling? It is a frank honest statement of a sentiment which people who call themselves Christians share, and except when they are posing share without shame. I may be wrong and those who differ from me may be right, but to me this type of indignation is Christian. There are a dozen different kinds of hatred and the most of them are wrong, but this kind is not wrong. It is one of the most salutary instincts the race possesses, a God given instinct for the conservation of moral values of infinite worth to the race. Not to feel it is to have a feeble and flabby consciousness of the wrong done.

How then can we reconcile it with our religion of peace and love and good will to men? Does not the

Bible teach us to forgive our enemies? Yes, but upon one condition, that they repent and turn from their evil ways. There is nothing in the Bible about the forgiveness of unrepented sin or unrepentant sinners. God does not forgive sin except on the condition of repentance. To do so would be to condone sin, to treat it as a light thing, and to confuse the moral distinctions of the universe. Hence one of the great, the essential words of the Gospel is Repent. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." "If thy brother trespass against thee rebuke him, and if he repent forgive him. If he trespass against thee seven times in a day and seven times in a day turn again to thee and say, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted that your sin may be blotted out." "If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." It was not until the prodigal repented and turned from his evil ways that the father's love could forgive him. While he went on sinning he must go on suffering. When Germany repents in sorrow and contrition for the wrong it has done the world and turns from its evil ways then it will be time to talk of forgiveness. As long as it upholds, defends, justifies and continues its course in the world even to talk of forgiveness is to make light of the wrong.

Then there is the example of our blessed Lord. Was He not meek and gentle, forgiving and loving to

all men? No, I say most emphatically, No! The conventional presentation of Christ in art, in literature, in our hymns and popular preaching as all gentleness and love, as wanting in a righteous anger and passionate feeling in the presence of wrong, is untrue to the Gospel record. We wrong our Christ if we cite Him as an example of misplaced tenderness toward willful and conscious wrong doing. The very opposite is the truth. There never was such an outspoken uncompromising antagonist of evil and evil doers. Because He was a passionate lover of righteousness He was a passionate hater of evil; the two go together; one does not truly and intensely love the right, who does not truly and intensely hate the wrong. No such denunciations of wrong doing and wrong doers are found in the Bible as fall from His lips. They ring out like trumpet blasts. One cannot read his denunciations of the Pharisees, every word of which burns and sears like molten lead, without being almost sorry for them. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" "Ye compass, sea and land to make one proselyte and then make him two-fold more a child of hell than yourselves." "Ye are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father ye will do." If I called the Germans rattlesnakes you would think I was going too far for a Christian minister, but vipers are worse than rattlesnakes, for they give no warning before they

strike; and the Germans are worse than the Pharisees. They are Pharisees indeed, immense in their self-satisfaction and self-righteousness, the salt of the earth, anointed of God, the crown of creation, the leaders of the world's culture, destined to inherit the earth; but the Pharisees were not baby killers, ravishers of little girls, torturers of old men and women. The Lord said to those who failed to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, visitation to the sick, comfort to the prisoners, "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." I should like to know what one of those commands the Germans have not violated toward their helpless, hungry, thirsty, sick prisoners. You have heard their story and can judge for yourselves.

Does He not teach us then to love our enemies? Yes, and He sets us the example. He loved His enemies, He prayed for them, He died for them, but that did not prevent Him from calling them serpents, vipers, children of hell, sons of the devil, whited sepulchers outwardly fair but within full with rottenness and dead mens' bones. They are His own words, we may not like them but we have no right to explain them away, or to say He did not mean what He said, to emphasize one side of His character and ignore the other, and so make for ourselves a false Christ.

The thunderbolts of the Jewish law are mild compared with His fulminations against the workers

of iniquity. The lightnings that played about Sinai are concentrated in the Sermon on the Mount. If the prophets portrayed Him as the Lamb of God, let us remember that they also portrayed Him as the Lion of the tribe of Juda. If they saw Him coming as a preacher of peace, they also saw Him coming up from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, red in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength. He forbade personal retaliation and revenge, but He did not forbid men to resist the invasion of their homes, the abuse of their wives, the murder of their children. To render men incapable of love, sympathy, compassion is to reduce them to beasts; to render them incapable of anger and moral indignation is to reduce them to a passionless paste. To take away the power or moral indignation would be as great a disaster as to take away the power of loving. It would not be giving men a new heart but fatty degeneration of the old heart. To refuse to return a blow or resent a personal injury is a brave, manly, Christian thing; but to stand by and see a helpless man or woman beaten into a jelly by a brutal bully and not go into the fight with both fists is unworthy of a man and a Christian. To make war for revenge, for commercial advantage or territorial expansion is an infamous crime; but to look on unmoved while a strong brutal nation invades an innocent, helpless people, loots its treasures, devastates its fields, burns its homes, desecrates its churches,

murders its old men and little children, dishonors its women, unless the will of God has broken down and all moral sanctions have lost their authority, then for a strong nation to look on in moral indifference without striking a blow is to sacrifice its self-respect and Christian manhood. A prominent clergyman has said, and I agree with him: "If I could be convinced that Jesus meant to make of me a non-resister under all circumstances, meant to develop in me a soft and easy toleration of wrong and wrong doers, meant me to compromise principle and negotiate peace at any price with an enemy rather than fight him, I should feel compelled to select from the list of the world's heroic worthies another teacher and guide who would bid me sacrifice and suffer, fight and die in behalf of honor and freedom, humanity and righteousness." Such is not the real Christ, the Christ of the Gospel, but the Christ of men's vain imagination.

Lastly, let me earnestly remind you that all this has another side. While we ought to feel intense resentment and the strongest moral recoil from such things, and not to hate, oppose and fight them is un-Christian, yet mercy and pity are also Christian virtues, and must have their large and rightful place. The prophet prays, "O Lord, in wrath remember mercy," and we ourselves need mercy and pity and must show it to others. "He shall have judgment without mercy who showed no mercy" applies to ourselves as well as our

enemies. When we think of what the German people are suffering and must suffer, their little children dying by thousands for lack of nourishment, their poor starving on sawdust, their streets filled with maimed and blind and helpless, their fathers, mothers, wives with bleeding hearts, and every house a home of mourning, surely our hearts must be as hard as millstones if we do not feel pity for them. I have pitied with all my heart a mad dog because the poor beast was mad and I had to shoot him. We can pity with all our hearts this people maddened, misguided, mistaught, made to see things as they are not, not knowing what they do. We are told that our Lord "looked round on the people with anger because of the hardness of their hearts," but a few days later standing on the slope of Olivet looking down upon the city and thinking of the sufferings in store for it, He stretched out His arms in longing, and with tears of pity in His eyes cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings and ye would not." Germany is suffering and must suffer for her sins, and we must pity her and pray for her because of her sufferings, even while we have to fight her to a finish to prevent the wrong and hurt she would do to the world. If I have said anything too hard about the German people or their rulers may God forgive me, but as I stand be-

fore God I do not in my heart believe that I have said anything more severe than our Lord would say to their faces if He were here on earth, and I leave it with Him.

“Trumpeter, sound for the splendour of God!
Sound the music whose name is law,
Whose service is perfect freedom still,
The order august that rules the stars!
Bid the anarchs of night withdraw;
Too long the destroyers have worked their will.
Sound for the last, the last of the wars!
Sound for the heights that our fathers trod,
When truth was truth and love was love,
With a hell beneath, but a heaven above.
Trumpeter, rally us, rally us, rally us,
On to the city of God.”



